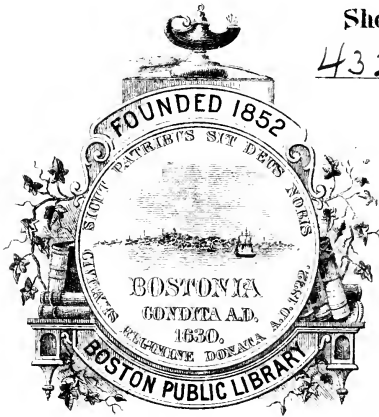


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Army Series.]

[No. 2.]

THE SOLDIER

OF

THE GOOD CAUSE.

BY

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

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THE SOLDIER OF THE GOOD CAUSE.

THE main characteristic of the war in which we of the Free States are engaged is that it is a war of the people. It is not a war of a class, a party, or a dynasty. In its most obvious aspect, as a war for the defence of the Constitution and the Union, of established authority and regular government, against the attacks of a defeated, insolent, and unprincipled party, or in its essential nature as a war for the extending and establishing of liberty and justice, it is alike the cause of the people, demanding and receiving their efforts, their means, and their blood to carry it to a happy issue. It "is not called amiss the Good Old Cause," for it is but the latest incident in that struggle, of which all modern history is the record, between the selfish interests of individuals or a class, and the common interests of mankind ; between despotism and freedom ; between privileges and rights ; between error and truth. It is the modern phase of the contest in which the best men have fought on battle-fields and in councils, with the sword and the written or

spoken word, with various fortune, but with unconquerable courage and unwearied exertion. In this contest Sidney fell gallantly at Zutphen, Cromwell conquered at Marston Moor, Milton lost his eyes overplied in his noble task, Winthrop and his companions laid the foundations of a new commonwealth, Hampden sacrificed fortune and life, and Washington set the perfect example of heroic self-devotion. And now the privilege of carrying on this struggle, of advancing this cause, is given to us. The hopes of the future are confided for the moment to our hands. To us the exhortations of the patriots and martyrs of liberty in past times are addressed, and for us their lives are lessons and encouragements.

And as this is, above all, the cause of popular rights and institutions, so it is fitting that our soldiers should be, as happily they are, drawn from the very heart of the people. Our battles are not to be fought by hirelings and mercenaries. The war forced upon us so suddenly is not to be carried on by a military class or by a standing army inured to service, but it has to be fought by soldiers hurriedly summoned from every class of life. Our army is the representative, in its heterogeneous composition, of the people itself. Native-born and adopted citizens, laborers and mechanics, students and ploughmen, men tenderly nurtured and men roughly bred, stand shoulder to shoulder in the ranks, each equally ready and eager to do his part in the work for his

country and for liberty. But such an army, so hastily brought together, of men so unused to the profession of war, though it be full of patriotic spirit and resolute determination, though it be one which carries with it the hearts and the confidence of the whole people, is not likely at first to be so effective as one composed of troops of less individual worth, but longer trained and more accustomed to the use of arms. Enthusiasm will not supply the place of discipline, and there is need of more than a good cause when it comes to the push.

As a nation we have so neglected the profession of war, we have been so busy in the pursuits of peace, we have regarded ourselves as so safe against the dangers of foreign invasion and of civil discord, that the true military spirit has become almost extinct among us, and its place has been occupied by a false spirit of security, indifference, and boastfulness. We have been growing rich and weak, at the same time. We have thought to buy immunity from war; we have paid heavy prices for quiet; and at length we find that the bargain was a fraud, and that the peace we have purchased by base compromise and cowardly concession was but a hollow and treacherous truce. Happy for us that the delusion has not lasted too long, and that now, when the truth is discovered, and the call comes to us to arms, we are ready to seize them, though we be little prepared to use them.

The dragon's teeth that the South has been sowing so long have indeed sprung up in a wonderful crop of armed men; but a man in uniform, with rifle and bayonet, is not a soldier. The profession of which such a man has only put on the dress is one that, like every other profession, requires a peculiar training, if it is to be successfully pursued. Its training is of the spirit as well as of the body, and is not comprised in the manœuvres of militia musters or the practice of regimental drill. Our soldiers have to learn how to be soldiers, and the nation requires to be taught the uses and the real meaning of war. The notion that any number of raw recruits form an army is an absurd one, and it seems likely to be done away with by bitter experience. Even Washington himself, the most patient and the most experienced commander of fresh troops, declared that undisciplined forces are nothing more than "a destructive, expensive, and disorderly mob." The saying of Cyrus, as reported by Xenophon, is as true to-day as it was in ancient times, that "it is not the number of men, but the number of good men, that gives the advantage."

It has been well said that "Discipline is the soul of an army"; and in order that discipline may be efficient the first duty of a soldier is obedience. To this duty the soldier is bound, not only by the oath in which he swears to bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, to serve them

honestly and faithfully against their enemies and opposers whomsoever, and, (to quote its very words,) that "I will observe and *obey* the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me,"—but also by a just and intelligent sense of the nature and demands of the life he has chosen. The military profession has this noble superiority to all others, that it is in its essence a life of voluntary self-sacrifice. The spirit of independence which is so cherished amongst us, and so often carried to foolish and injurious excess, so often serving but as the disguise of selfishness and false pretension, is shown by the true soldier in its finest form. He exhibits it in the choice he makes to give up his own freedom of action, and in the ready alacrity of his obedience to the commands of his officers. He shows it in the cheerfulness of his submission,—not only to orders, but to privations; in his fidelity to his work, in his high and honorable sense of duty. There is no true independence in that disposition which is constantly inclined to assert itself in resistance to established authorities and rightful restraints; but true and manly independence finds in these very restraints, and in the performance of just commands, the means to display and to develop the best qualities of individual character, and to achieve the aims of a pure ambition. The independent man is he whose soul is as ready to submit to and obey

legal and necessary authority, as it is to resist an unjust and tyrannous exercise of power. The soldier loses not a jot of his independence in obedience. Whatever the order be, he fulfils it with good will. It may be a blunder, and he may see it to be so, but it is not for him to redress it. He has only to execute it as well as it can be executed. The charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, which shall be held in immortal memory among men, is a noble example of this prompt and thorough obedience.

“ ‘Forward, the Light Brigade!’
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Some one had blundered:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not the reason why,
Theirs but to do or die, —
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.”

It has been said that the very intelligence of our men, their habit of judging for themselves, and of acting on their own judgments, unfit them for making good soldiers, as rendering them averse to that obedience which is their first duty. But, if they be truly intelligent, they will understand that they must honestly conform to the necessities of their new profession, and that not only success, but safety, depends on their unquestioning obedience. The good soldier's first sacrifice is that of his individual will.

It is this resolute obedience which gives confidence to each man in the ranks that he will be supported by every other man in his regiment. He is not one out of a thousand men each acting on his own impulse, but a thousand are with him, and his strength and stroke are a thousand-fold repeated. One word gives vigor to a thousand arms, and one order is answered by a flash from a thousand rifles.

It is thus that obedience connects itself with, and serves as the foundation of, that soldierly sympathy of each man with his companions, which is known as *esprit de corps*. This is that brotherhood which unites in mutual confidence, in generous affection and ambition, the individuals of a regiment; which gives a common spirit to their body, and moulds them into one living organization. Each has a share in the common dangers and glories, and upon each the praise of all is reflected. The colors of the regiment, its guns, become invested by this spirit with an almost sacred worth. A rag of bunting, torn by shot and blackened by powder, or a cannon battered and broken by opposing artillery, are precious in the eyes of the true soldier, as the emblems and signals of his own and his comrades' valor and devotion, the tokens of duty bravely done, of brave deeds yet to do. "Where his colors go, there he will follow, and where they are surrounded, there, with them or upon them, he will remain." He

may fall, but his regiment survives. Its honor is his own, and to have served in its ranks is to be illustrious among men.

It is not fame or reputation that the true soldier mainly seeks. They are but the uncertain and fleeting accidents of his profession. His aim is to be honorable, not to be honored ; to be brave, not to win reputation of courage. It is not for show that the soul is to play its part. "The essence of greatness is to feel that virtue is enough." Honor is a spiritual thing, it is not in the gift of man, its fountain is God. There is nothing that is not cheap and poor in comparison with it. Loss, privation, suffering, are cheerfully borne for its sake, and life itself may well be sacrificed to gain it. It is the proud distinction of the soldier's profession that he makes it his first and constant object. The good soldier carries his life in his hand, ready to exchange it for honor, and he is thus always the witness to its inestimable worth. He is the example from which other men take their lessons in its pursuit. He yields his affections, his interests, his hopes, his all, to its claims. In the tumult of battle, in the temptations of the camp, he never loses sight of it. Honor flings her white robe of purity around him, and in the distress of pain and the very agony of death she clasps him to her consoling bosom.

The cold common-sense of the world knows not

the great joy of the good soldier's life and death. The sense of danger undergone for the sake of the reward of honor won is a glorious exultation. Common sense, which counts its heap of copper gains, knows not the golden prizes of the battle-field. The honorable soldier has no fear. He cannot be defeated. He will stand to his guns though the last man has been shot at his side, and in his death he will have the delight of triumph. His courage knows no faltering. The weakness of his blood may make his knees tremble and his cheek grow pale, but his heart is constant and secure in its inviolable mail. No weariness can break him down, no long watches make him sleep on his post. His ready courage is not a sudden and transient passion, is not stimulated by revenge or anger, is not the brutal rage of the bully or the tinsel bravery of the boaster. It is not a start of the soul, but a resolute and constant habit, a firm virtue founded in principle and character. The real hero is he who never gives in. The only genuine heroism is that which persists to the end. Courage and the love of honor are interwoven together, and their roots spring from the same soil of self-respect and trust in God.

Shall it be said that this ideal of the good soldier is too high to be attained? that to demand such a spirit of obedience, of brotherhood, of honor and of courage, is to ask too much of our common soldier? He must answer for himself. The cause

in which our soldiers are engaged deserves to be fought for by the best men. And the army which has poured itself from the North to meet the Southern forces of barbarism and slavery is such as was never before seen. Are the Stars and Stripes, the banner of civilization, liberty, and justice, to be carried to victory by an undisciplined rabble of men serving for monthly pay, and thirsting for booty and blood; or by an army of men conscious of their duty, animated by a conviction of their responsibilities, and strong in virtuous resolve? Is the day of Bull Run to be the type of coming days of battle? On the answer rest the hopes of future times.

There is but one way in which our soldiers can make themselves worthy of our cause and of our country; but one way in which they can secure the virtue that is required of them. Enthusiasm for the flag, devotion to the Union, indignation against traitors, patriotic pride, an honest love of liberty and hate of slavery, the spirit of emulation or of manly shame, may supply motives of more or less force, and of unequal worth, to the mass of men who have gone to the war. But such incitements are of too external a character to form a safe and sufficient reliance in this great contest. They must be associated with motives of deeper and more spiritual origin. Our war is in its real nature a religious war, and our soldiers must acknowledge

themselves to be not only the soldiers of the United States, but the soldiers of the Lord. To them God has committed a great charge, and as his children and servants they must perform it. Great virtues are demanded of them, and it is matter of rejoicing that no meaner call is made. "The occasion of any great virtue cometh but on festivals." To be the worthy champion of this noble cause, to be the fit sharer in this great festival, a man must carry with him the assurance that he is acting in the immediate presence, and as the commissioned soldier of God. With this assurance, there is no ideal perfection too high for him to aim at, and no possession of virtue too difficult for him to obtain. "God with us" is the motto on our flag, distinct to the eye of the spirit. "God with us,"—what shall prevail against us?

In the bustle of life in camp, in daily drill, in the trivial, annoying details of duty, in the mixed company of men, in the temptations of idleness, in the presence of open vice, in the unchecked opportunities for the indulgence of criminal passions, in the display of bad examples, it is difficult to retain the sense of the nearness of God. But according to the difficulty so is the reward of attainment. The difficulty is the test of worth and manliness. Without temptation there is no real virtue; without resistance, no increase of strength; without self-command, no self-respect. The soldier of the

Lord is not a bigot, nor self-righteous; he is the pleasantest, because the happiest, of companions. He does not set himself up as better than others, but is modest with a reserved and simple self-confidence. He makes neither a secret nor a boast of the source of his strength. He is helpful, generous, vigilant, and not less eager to learn than ready to perform his duty;—

“ More pure
As tempted more; more able to endure
As more exposed to suffering and distress;
Thence also more alive to tenderness.”

There is nothing in danger or alarm to disturb or affright him. On the solitary watch, his eye is alert and his spirit steady; in the sudden alarm, he does not lose the even balance of his mind, and in utmost emergency he can depend upon himself. In the assault he is foremost, and he will lead the forlorn hope with a step as light and happy as a lover's. Neither the shout of the enemy, nor the rattle of musketry, nor the roar of the cannon, can disturb the quiet of his soul. He looks at death face to face, and finds nothing but what is friendly in her countenance. And if he fall, he falls at the foot of his country's flag with a smile that bears witness to his joy that his life has been accepted as a sacrifice in his country's cause, the divine cause of justice, liberty, and humanity.



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